Mary Fuller

A

SERMON,

PREACHED JULY 13, 1805.

AT THE

FUNERAL OF

Mrs. LYDIA FISK,

LATE CONSORT OF THE

REV. ELISHA FISK,

PASTOR OF THE FIRST CHURCH IN WRENTHAM.

BY NATHANIAL EMMONS, D. D.
PASTOR OF THE CHURCH IN FRANKLIN.

Dedham:
PRINTED BY *H. MANN*,
AUGUST—1805.

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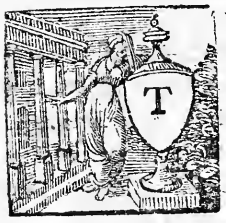
A FUNERAL SERMON.

REVELATION XIV, 13.

And I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.



THE beloved apostle tells us, in the beginning of this chapter, that he was favored with a vision of heaven and of its holy and happy inhabitants. He saw the Lamb of God standing on mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads. And he heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps; and singing as it were a new song before the throne, which none could learn but the hundred forty and four thousand, who were redeemed from the earth. After receiving this clear and full view of the blessed state of departed saints, he is divinely directed to write what he had

seen, and assure living christians, that their death should put a final period to all the evils of the present life, and immediately convey them to everlasting rest. "And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, Write, Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them." This last clause of the verse gives the reason why those who die in the Lord are blessed. It is because, "from henceforth;" that is, from the moment of death, they enter into heaven, where God is, and where Christ is, and where all holy beings will finally meet, and be completely happy. The text suggests two things to our serious consideration.

I. What it is to die in the Lord.

II. Why those who die in the Lord are blessed.

I. Let us consider what it is to die in the Lord.

This mode of expression signifies the same thing that the apostle Paul meant, when speaking of Andronicus and Junia he said, "who were in Christ before me." All men are naturally in a state of alienation from God, and cannot be said "to be in the Lord," until they become reconciled to God, united to Christ by faith, and entitled to eternal life. But here it seems proper to be a little more particular, and to observe,

1. That to die in the Lord implies dying in a full and realizing belief of the being and perfections of God. There is a natural propensity in mankind to disbelieve the existence of Him, who made, upholds, and governs the universe. "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." There is reason to fear, that multitudes in this land of light, live all their days in a state of practical infidelity, and never realize the existence and perfections of the Deity. But those who live without faith, must die without hope. None, therefore, can die in the Lord, unless they awake from their natural stupidity, and realize that there is a great and holy God, who loves

righteousness and hates iniquity, and who will reward or punish them in a future state, according to their works. Such a belief is prior to, and the foundation of, all preparation for the service and enjoyment of God. Hence says the apostle, "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." It is easy for God to awaken the most thoughtless and secure, either in health, or in sickness, or on a dying bed, to realize his being, his holiness, his justice, and awful sovereignty in having mercy on whom he will have mercy. But while they remain under the power and dominion of an unholy heart, such a view of the being and perfections of their Creator fills their souls with nothing but enmity, anxiety, and distress. They cannot bear the thought of living, or dying under the just displeasure of a sin-hating and sin-revenging God. But the sovereign Lord of life has a right to call those, who are in this deplorable situation, out of time into eternity; and there is great reason to believe, that he has often seen fit to exercise this right, since so many have apparently died without submission and without hope. This leads me to observe,

2. That dying in the Lord implies dying in the *love*, as well as in the *belief* of God. Though God be infinitely amiable in himself, and though awakened and convinced sinners see him to be worthy of their supreme affection; yet they cannot entertain the least thought of dying in the Lord, while they sensibly feel their hearts rising in opposition to his great and amiable character. This is often felt by those, who lie on a sick, or dying bed; but so long as they feel this, death looks as terrible as eternal destruction, and appears to be inseperably connected with it. They are conscious of the moral impossibility of their enjoying God, either in this life, or the life to come, without a moral conformity to his moral image. They have a clear conviction, that they must love God for what he is in himself, and be pleased not only with his goodness and grace, but with his justice and sovereignty, before they can be truly

happy in any part of the universe. But as soon as they renounce their enmity and become heartily reconciled to God, then they may be said to be in God and God in them. For "he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him." Such a union of heart to God is one thing essentially necessary to prepare men to go into his immediate presence, and to be forever happy in the contemplation of his glory.

3. To die in the Lord implies love to Christ and entire dependence on him for pardon and acceptance in the sight of God. Love to God is previous to love to Christ, and lays the only proper foundation for it. This appears from his own declaration in the sixth of John. "Every man that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father cometh unto me." True faith in Christ springs from love to the true character of God, which Christ loved, and displayed by his sufferings on the cross. Those, who love God, love Christ for loving God, and opening the door of mercy to sinners. It is only for Christ's sake, that God can consistently receive the penitent and broken-hearted. But when these look to God for forgiveness, by faith in Christ, they are justified freely by his grace, and entitled to eternal life. To believe in Christ is to be *in* Christ, and to be *in* Christ is to be *in* the Lord, and to be *in* the Lord is to be prepared to die *in* the Lord. Faith in Christ disarms death of its sting and the grave of its terrors. This the apostles and primitive christians knew by happy experience. Hence they could say, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Though all who are united to Christ, and accepted of God, are really in the Lord, and shall die in safety; yet it is proper to observe still further,

4. That to die in the Lord in the full sense of the text, implies dying in a lively and well founded hope of the favour of God and the enjoyment of heaven. As God knows his chil-

dren stand in peculiar need of light and comfort in a dying hour, so he often manifests himself unto them as he does not to the world, gives them the spirit of adoption, and opens to their view a joyful prospect of the holiness and happiness of the kingdom of glory. We find many instances of this kind recorded in scripture, for the consolation of his friends in the close of life. He seems to have given David such divine views and feelings when he said, "As for me, I willbehold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness. Thou wilt shew me the path of life, in thy presence is fulness of joy, at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore." Paul experienced the same hope and confidence, under a lively view of future and invisible realities. "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better." It was a proverb in Israel, "The righteous hath hope in his death." And it has often been seen since, "in what peace a christian may die." Many pious souls have smiled in death, and with joy unspeakable and full of glory bid adieu to the world, and taken possesson of the inheritance of the saints in light. Those, therefore, who expire in a clear view, in an ardent desire, and a well grounded hope of the joys of heaven, do most eminently and visibly die in the Lord.

II. Let us now consider why those who die in the Lord are blessed. And here the first thing that occurs is,

1. Because they have a solid foundation to die in peace. This is peculiar to them in distinction from all the rest of mankind. How many millions of the human race have found all their hopes perish in the near prospect of the grave and the scenes that lie beyond it? Death is commonly the king of terrors to such as are not prepared to leave the world, and to some who are. The pains of the body are often much less distressing, at the hour of dissolution, than the fears of death and the awful apprehensions of an opening eternity. It is in-

deed a fearful thing for the wicked to see themselves falling into the hands of the living God, who is about to pour out the vials of his wrath upon them, without mixture and without end. But how happy are those, who are satisfied with living, reconciled to dying, and longing for admission into the mansions of bliss? How happy were the patriarchs in their last moments, who, after finishing their weary pilgrimage, died in faith of future and eternal felicity beyond the grave? Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and Joseph left the world in peace. Moses died in the full prospect of the heavenly as well as earthly Canaan. The last words of David were, "God hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; and this is all my salvation and all my desire." Good old Simeon said in the view of his approaching disease, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word." Stephen being filled with the Holy Ghost, at the moment of death, "looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God," and expired with these words on his lips, "Lord Jesus receive my spirit." Paul's prospect of death was joyful and triumphant, when, looking back upon his past, and looking forward to his future life, he said, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." Certainly it is much to be desired, then to escape the terrors of the grave, and to enjoy peace and serenity of mind in the dark and trying hour of death; and this is very frequently the happy lot of those, who die in the Lord.

2. Those who die in the Lord are blessed, because they immediately enter into the heavenly state. This is suggested in the text. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord,

from henceforth." The moment, they leave the world, they pass into glory. Enoch, Moses, and Elijah, were carried directly from earth to heaven. Lazarus was conducted by angels to Abraham's bosom. The poor, penitent malefactor was raised from the cross to the Paradise above. And all who have died in the Lord, have entered into that rest, which is provided for the people of God. Were the souls of the righteous struck out of existence at death, or thrown into a state of total insensibility, they could not be said to be actually happy; but if they survive the body, and immediately ascend to heaven, then they must be immediately and unspeakably blessed.

For, *first*, they are completely released from all the sufferings of the present life. Here they were born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. Here all the seasons and all the elements were armed against them. Here they suffered by innumerable pains, infirmities, and diseases of the body. Here they endured public calamities as well as personal afflictions. Here they were subjected to mental and manual labor and fatigue, from day to day and year to year, in every situation of life. Here they were called to fight the good fight of faith, and surmount ten thousand obstacles, which were thrown in the way of their duty, by themselves and others. Here they lived and died in a state, which was designed and calculated to fill their eyes with tears, and wring their hearts with sorrow. But they shall never suffer, nor sigh, nor weep any more. No natural evil shall ever give them another painful sensation. They have arrived at a perfect and perpetual rest from all the labors, sorrows, and sufferings, which they once endured in this vale of tears. And this prepares them for the pure and positive enjoyments of heaven.

Secondly. They are freed from all *moral* as well as *natural* evil. Their sinning as well as their suffering is come to a

final period. Though they sincerely loved God and all their fellow creatures, while they tabernacled in flesh ; yet their holy and devout affections were often interrupted by the world and the things of the world, as well as by the great adversary of souls. But their pious and benevolent affections shall now roll on forever, without the least interruption from any thing past or future. They shall feel perfectly right towards God, towards Christ, towards the Holy Ghost, towards Angels, towards Saints, and towards all the intelligent creation. There shall never exist in their breasts a single purpose, desire, or wish, that they would not be willing the whole universe should know. They will lay their hearts open to the perfect friendship of all the inhabitants of heaven, which will afford them the purest felicity, that can be enjoyed by intelligent and holy beings. They will constantly feel and constantly express entire complacency in each other's character, situation, and enjoyments, which will put every individual, as far as possible, into the possession of the whole happiness of heaven.

Thirdly. They will be united not only in their affections but in their happy employments. Though they will entirely rest from their past earthly labors and painful exertions ; yet they will be continually employed in holy and devout exercises. The heavenly inhabitants are represented as in a state of perpetual activity. They rest not day nor night, from praising Him, who sitteth on the throne, and Him, who died for them, and made them kings and priests unto God. Heaven is incessantly resounding with the prayers and praises, which flow from the love and admiration of those, who have safely reached the haven of everlasting rest.

Besides, *fourthly*, their happiness is greatly augmented, by immediately reaching the *Perfection* of their nature. In this world they were in a state of minority, where all their

intellectual powers were restrained and obstructed in their growth and operation. But as soon as they throw off all the clogs and obstructions of the body, and leave this dark and cloudy world, their noble faculties will expand, and reach their proper vigor and maturity. Every natural and moral excellence, which they possessed in this life, will be carried to perfection in the next. Though every soul will not be equally great, equally good, and equally happy; yet each individual will be perfectly great, perfectly good, and perfectly happy. The infant, the child, the youth, the man, the middle-aged, and the aged, will each arrive at the *perfection* of his nature, as soon as he first enters into the heavenly world, where no imperfection ever comes. This the apostle Paul, who was caught up into heaven, plainly represents as the state of the blessed. "We know in part, and we prophecy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." We are, in the present state, totally unacquainted with the maturity of human nature. We have never seen any mind brought to its natural or moral perfection. But those who die in the Lord, will immediately find their own perfection, and the perfection of others, who arrived before them to the mansions of the blessed. And when they have come to the perfection of their nature, and all the natural excellencies are adorned with the beauty of holiness, how glorious must they appear? how happy must they be? What rapid advances must they make in divine knowledge and holy love, in the world of light? There is Adam, and Moses, and the Prophets, and the Apostles, and Christ himself, to pour instruction into their inquisitive and full-grown minds.—

There the history of God and of man will be completely laid open; and there will be nothing within, and nothing without, to divert their attention or impede their progress in divine knowledge and divine enjoyments. Such abundant evidence do we find in the scriptures of truth, of the consummate blessedness of those who die in the Lord.

It now remains to close the subject, by some serious and suitable

REFLECTIONS.

1. What has been said naturally leads us to reflect upon the absurdity as well as criminality of imbibing and propagating the principles of infidelity. Those who deny the existence of God, and reject the revelation of his will, destroy the only solid foundation of their own peace and comfort in the views of mortality. They know they must die and leave the world, like all other men. But while they persist in denying the Being, and the word of God, they plunge themselves in utter darkness, respecting their existence and condition in a future state. It is the word of God only, which has brought life and immortality to light; and when this light is once extinguished in the minds of any, they can find no rational ground of hope beyond the grave. It is out of their power to prove, either that they shall exist, or that they shall not exist, after death; and if they should exist, that their existence will afford them any happiness. They cannot prove, that there is not another world, nor that the other world will not be a state of complete and endless misery. For, if they can exist in this world without a God, they may exist in another world without a God; and if they can suffer in this world without a God, they may suffer in another world without a God. The principles of atheists and infidels directly tend to take away every ray of hope in the hour of death. And the more learned, the more ingenious, the more reflecting they are, the

more pain, anxiety, and distress they may expect to feel, when death approaches and eternity opens to view. This has been found to be the case, by the bitter experience of the most celebrated infidels, who lost all their hopes and sunk into despair, at the trying and awful hour of death, which has often filled the souls of pious believers with joy and triumph. If we believe, that it is safe and happy to die in the Lord, then we must believe, that to die without God, without Christ, and without hope, must be, of all things this side of eternity, the most painful and distressing to a rational and immortal mind. Infidelity never appears more absurd and shocking, than in contrast with the scenes of mortality. Who can wish to be an infidel, while he stands around a deceased saint, or a deceased sinner? Death is one of the most powerful antidotes against infidelity, and if any thing in this world can effectually convince unbelievers of the absurdity and criminality of their sentiments, it seems that a serious and contemplative view of the dying and of the dead, must produce this desirable effect. If they have the least humanity, they must wish to see their fellow men die in peace, and to die in peace themselves. They must renounce either their principles, or all claim to tender and benevolent feelings. For nothing can be more cruel, than to destroy in their own minds and in the minds of others, every ground of hope in a dying hour. Let them no longer reject the counsels of God against themselves, but make it the business of their remaining days, to prepare themselves and others for a peaceable death and a blessed immortality.

2. It is a serious and weighty reflection suggested by this subject, that nothing will prepare men for death but what will prepare them for heaven. It is the ardent wish of many to escape the wrath to come, though they have no desire to go to heaven, and dwell forever in the presence of an holy God. These persons often imagine, that they are sincerely

preparing for death, while they are making no preparation for heaven. They live soberly, walk uprightly before men, frequently meditate on the shortness and uncertainty of life, read the word of God, observe the sabbath strictly, call upon God in private and secret, and perform every external duty, which they find necessary to maintain peace of conscience, and banish the fears of death. But these are refuges of lies, which naturally tend to complete disappointment and despair. Death will destroy every ground of hope, but that which is built upon a renovation of heart, and a cordial reconciliation to God. Our Saviour, who holds the keys of death and of hell, expressly said to those in his day, who were strictly moral and externally religious, but destitute of internal holiness, " Except ye be born again, ye cannot see the kingdom of God. And except ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." Love to God, faith in Christ, and a sincere desire to glorify and enjoy God, are essential to a due preparation for death. No external duties, no selfish desires, no mercenary hopes of future happiness, will fit men for heaven; nothing short of holy love and purity of heart will prepare them to be absent from the body and present with the Lord.

3. This subject shows us how much those honor and support religion in the eyes of the world, who really and visibly die in the Lord. While they lie upon the confines of time and eternity, with sweet composure and serenity of mind, joyfully waiting for the happy moment to join the general assembly and church of the first-born in heaven, they exhibit the most beautiful and instructive spectacle ever to be seen on earth. Their solemn and trying situation affords them the best opportunity of discovering to all around them the beauty, strength, and consoling power of vital piety. The clear and lively prospect of eternity is one of the sweetest tests of the real views and feelings of expiring christians.

The most hardened and stupid are constrained to acknowledge, that that religion, which removes the fears of death, and fills the soul with joy, when nature is decaying and all earthly hopes are vanishing, must be a divine and important reality. Nothing *strengthens* the hopes of saints, and *destroys* the hopes of sinners so much, as beholding a sincere believer die in the full enjoyment of the peculiar supports and consolations of the gospel. The wicked are frequently more struck with a conviction of the reality and importance of religion by seeing a saint die in serenity and joy, than by seeing one of their own character die in all the darkness and bitterness of despair. How beautiful and how important has religion often appeared in those who died in the Lord? How often has an expiring saint constrained sinners to desire, that they might die the death of the righteous, and that their last end might be like his? How calm, and serene, and instructive, was the death of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; of Joseph, Joshua, and David? They called their families and friends around them, conversed freely with them, gave them their dying counsel, and closed their eyes in peace. These examples are recorded for the instruction and admonition of all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Let them set their houses and their souls in order, and prepare to glorify God, do honor to religion, and give the finishing stroke to their character, by a calm, peaceful, and instructive death. This will embalm their memories, and make them blessings to the world after they have left it.

Finally, the subject we have been contemplating affords matter of peculiar consolation to Mourners, who have good evidence, that their departed friends have died in the Lord. This consideration removes the heaviest part of bereavements, mixes light with darkness and joy with sorrow. Though pious friends are the most amiable and valuable, and their lives are the most to be desired; yet their death is least to be re-

gretted and lamented, if to be regretted and lamented at all. If they have left evidence of their dying in the Lord and entering into rest ; their gain, their happy change, their present glory and felicity in the presence and enjoyment of God, ought to inspire the hearts of their surviving relatives with gratitude and joy, however great a loss they have suffered by the painful separation.

This consolation, we trust, the bereaved and afflicted PASTOR of this People has now a right to enjoy. Though God has been pleased, by a long, pining, painful sickness, to put an early period to the life of his dear CONSORT ; yet he has brought about this melancholy event under the most desirable and alleviating circumstances. He gave Mrs. FISK time and opportunity, and apparently an *heart*, to prepare for a peaceful and happy death. While her body and her mind were sufficiently vigorous, though under the decays of nature, he arrested her attention, by a sudden, clear, and impressive view of his being, his character, and absolute sovereignty. Her fears were alarmed, her conscience was awakened, and she saw nothing before her but an awful and miserable eternity. In this distressing situation, he made her acquainted with the plague of her own heart, and fully convinced her, that she was entirely in his hands, as the clay is in the hands of the potter, and that he had a good right to make her either a vessel of mercy or vessel of wrath. But as her sense of danger, her conviction of guilt, and her opposition to divine sovereignty, were very strong and sensible ; so these exercises of mind were of short duration. God soon appeared for her, and turned her heart from enmity to love, from fear to hope, and from distress to joy. Next to those views and feelings a happy calmness and tranquility of mind succeeded, and generally continued, until her strength failed, and she hopefully fell a sleep in Jesus. Her husband saw these marks of divine power and grace upon her heart, which

are now suited to pour the balm of consolation into his wounded breast. He has abundant reason to be satisfied with every step God has taken, to separate lover and friend, and lay his acquaintance in the dust. Let him, with an eye of faith and hope, follow her into eternity, and view her as resting from all the labors, pains, infirmities, and imperfections of mortality, as reaching the perfection of her nature, and as completely blessed in all the enjoyments of heaven: and these views of her joys will assuage his sorrows, and melt his heart into gratitude and submission. Since she honored God and religion, by dying in the Lord, her example calls upon him to honor both, by walking softly before God, and manifesting a patient, quiet, filial spirit, under his correcting hand. And may the God of all grace and consolation, give him that peace, which the world cannot give, and which the world cannot take away.

The particular Relatives and Friends of the deceased will eye the goodness as well as severity of God, in her early death. Though they may think there is some severity, in his calling her so soon from the stage of life, yet they must acknowledge there is great apparent goodness, in preparing her to depart in peace. They cannot sorrow, as those who have no hope. And their hope, that she is gone to rest, may well suppress their tears and soften their hearts to receive the instructions of providence. Whether they have hitherto improved, or misimproved the day of grace, this bereavement bids them to be ready also. And, O, that they may be wise, that they may understand this, that they may consider their latter end!

The Church and Congregation in this place, are especially called upon to lay this instance of mortality to heart. Mrs. Fisk was placed in a *conspicuous* and *important* situation. Her dissolution was long expected, and in the course of her

lingering and fatal disorder, she gave a peculiar, striking public evidence of the great change she experienced. She did every thing her state would permit, to manifest her love to God, to Christ, to his cause, and to his friends. She has left her dying testimony in favor of the reality, the comfort, and the importance of religion. And she being dead, now speaketh to this People with whom she was nearly connected, in a solemn, though silent voice, and calls upon them to prepare to follow her not only into the grave, but into the kingdom of glory. Her voice is the voice of God, which it concerns the secure and the awakened, the young and the old, and the friends as well as enemies of Christ, to hear and obey. Since all must die, it is of infinite importance to all to prepare to die in the Lord. Now they have the opportunity to prepare ; but to-morrow may be too late. Behold, now is the accepted time ; behold now is the day of salvation. And if ye will hear the voice of God in his word and providence, harden not your hearts.